Butterflies of Idlwan

And other Fantasies

By

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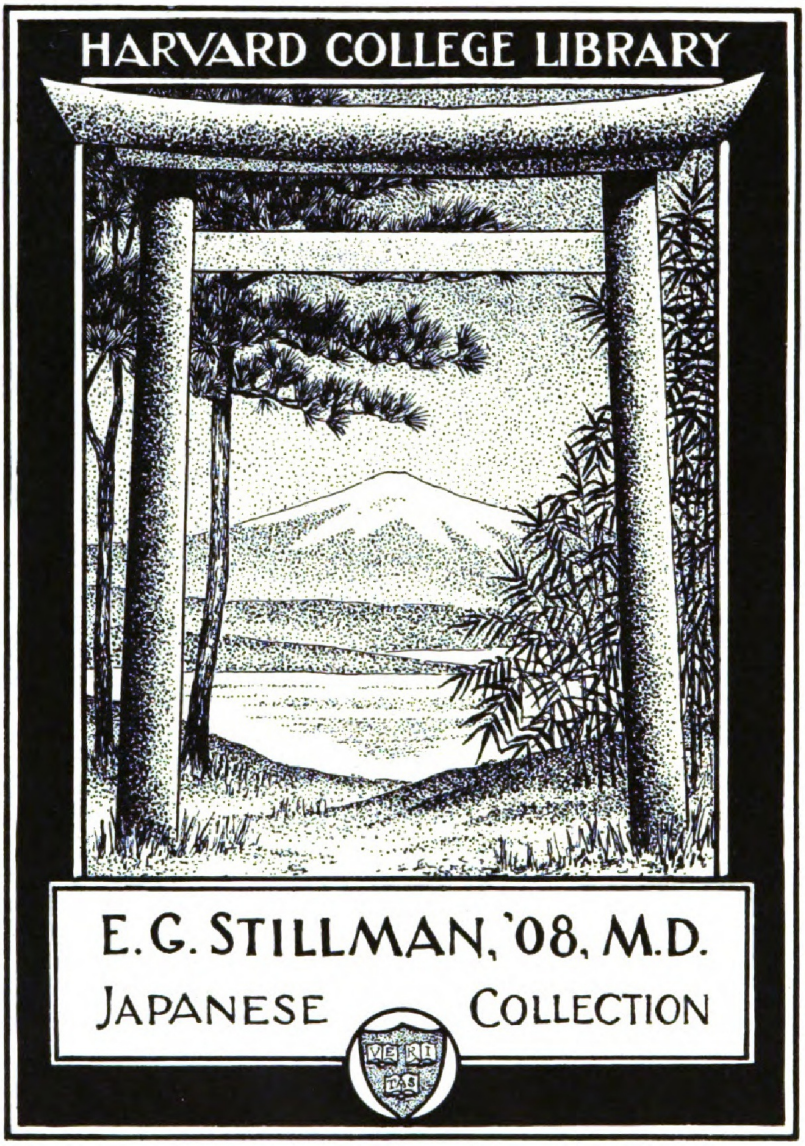

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THE BUTTERFLIES OF TAIWAN

AND OTHER FANTASIES

BY

JANET B. MONTGOMERY McGOVERN

Author of "Among the Head-Hunters of Formosa"

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Preface

A GREATER writer than I once said, in effect (I am writing in a land where English books are too few for exact quotations to be given) that facts can sometimes be disguised as fiction and gain a hearing, whereas were they given as facts, they would be derided as fiction. The writer in question then proceeded to spin a yarn of a sea-serpent.

In the *Fantasies* which this little volume contains there is no tale of a sea-serpent, but there are incidents of life—and of death—which perhaps will seem unreal to those who have not lived as I have lived in Japan; that is, not as a member of the "foreign community," but as—for a time—the only Caucasian in a Japanese village, far removed from "foreign" influence of any sort, where the "lives that they lived were mine"; or perhaps, more exactly speaking, the life that I lived was theirs.

Under these circumstances, I grew to know more intimately the present-day life of the Japanese—especially the Japanese women—than would have been possible in a life-time's residence in Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, or other cities in Japan where the circle of the "foreign community" scarcely touches that of the Japanese, and in more intimate aspects not at all.

Even this small village—one on the island of KYUSHU—was not free from the complications of present-day life as these are reflected in Japan, and as these are changing her age-old social customs and the outlook of her people; especially of her women. Therein lies the tragedy; or a large part of it—the conflict of the two generations of to-day, the older and the younger. In all countries and

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in all ages it is in a measure true to say that this is an ever-recurring tragedy. But of China and Japan it is true in a peculiar manner. Japan I know more intimately; therefore, it is of her people that I write.

These *Fantasies* are the fruit of tales that were told to me, of lives that intimately touched mine, during the period of what people of my own race called my "exile"; an exile in a sense it was, but one during which I learned much; far more, I am sure, than I taught, though during this time I was supposed to teach to a certain few the language and customs of the West.

Naturally many things that during this time I learned can be given to the public only in fiction or "fantasy"—with names changed and incidents slightly altered. But, like the historical novels of one's childhood days—which for one's sins one was "allowed" to read—all these *Fantasies* are founded on fact, and an attempt has been made to give the point of view—the "reaction" (to use this word in its modern, and especially its American, sense) of facts, of outward incidents, upon the life, itself, of the people concerned.

The present conflict between the old and the new tends toward a certain confusion of thought in Japan; especially is this true of the women who only in this generation are grasping—or grasping toward—those Western ideas and modes of thought with which the men of Japan became familiar in the last generation. The natural result of this is a lack of understanding between the older women and the younger. And in a country like Japan where the position of the mother-in-law, or the oldest woman member of the household, is supreme, and where according to ancient custom a wife can be divorced or sent back to her father's house if she "fails to conform to the customs of her husband's household"—which means, in effect, to

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the ideas of her mother-in-law, and to follow without deviation in the footsteps of the old lady—tragedy is often the result.

The word "tragedy" in the above connection I use advisedly, for too often is this word associated, as regards life in Japan, only with the idea of lovers dying together—leaping over a waterfall, or binding themselves together with an *obi* (broad sash) and throwing themselves into a lake or into the sea. Such tragedies do occur, and have been celebrated from time immemorial in Japanese poetry, and in stories told—or chanted—by professional story-tellers of Japan. Naturally in such cases the mistress for whom the lover dies is a *geisha* (dancing girl); occasionally an actress; and as he is too poor—as in such instances is almost invariably the case—to purchase for himself a monopoly of her charms, he decides that life without the lady in question is unbearable. A permanent union on the other side of the grave is a possibility, therefore, death is preferable. His enamorata goes willingly with him over the waterfall or into the lake or sea; she loves him and accepts this as a natural corollary of love where permanent earthly union is out of the question. Such tragedies are a reflection of one side of Japanese life which it is, perhaps, a little difficult for a European unacquainted with the Oriental point of view to understand. This in two respects: in the first place, love as the European understands it—love between the sexes—is a sentiment supposed to be unknown in the breast of a respectable woman in Japan. That after marriage her life should be lived for her husband and children, that for these she should feel a deep and unswerving affection, one that neither infidelity nor ingratitude can alienate (of physical cruelty toward women—other than those of subject races, Formosan and Korean

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—Japanese are not guilty), yes; this is accepted as a matter of course. Self-sacrifice is the key-note of the life of the wife and mother. But equally as a matter of course is it accepted that a woman "shielded from life's temptations" should know nothing of passion. That a respectable young woman should before marriage "fall in love" is in Japan a thing inconceivable; and the idea would be abhorrent. It would imply extreme indelicacy of mind on the part of the young lady in question, who, as a matter of course, marries the man chosen for her by her parents. That is, with all except the simple fisher-folk and peasants. Among these people, when pulling in the nets or working in the rice paddies, a genuine love-affair—in the Western sense of the phrase—sometimes develops between young men and women, but even among the fisher and peasant folk parental interference frequently prevents such love affairs ending in marriage. (Such an incident has been touched upon in one of the *Fantasies*.) Parental authority is, generally speaking, unquestioned in Japan.

The other aspect of the "love tragedies" of Japan—so frequently depicted in poetry and in story-telling—which it is difficult for a European to understand is the comparative lightness with which the taking of life is regarded. This may be true of all Oriental countries; certainly it is true of Japan. Suicide is associated with no feeling of horror in the mind of the Japanese. Rather is it considered a noble and heroic ending to life; one of which descendants and other members of the suicide's family may well be proud; it is a mark of stoicism, of "unafraidness."

The social and domestic customs in Japan differ more widely, in reality, from those of the West than do the religious. Among other points of difference is the acceptance

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on the part of the legal wife of the fact that when her charms fade, or in the event that she does not bear children, her husband will take a "second wife," that phrase being used in a very different sense from the one in which it is used in the West. Nor is the taking a "second wife" always long deferred, for in a country where marriage is arranged always by parents—reference to which has already been made—or by professional "go-betweens," the woman to whom the husband has taken a fancy is often installed as "second wife" shortly after his formal marriage with the first wife. The patience and gentleness under these circumstances of the "first," or legal, wife is a matter of admiration—or of wonder—to the Western man or woman.

Another thing which must be borne in mind, in order at all to understand the Japanese point of view, is that the family, rather than the individual, is the unit; the individual must in every instance be sacrificed to the family, the woman to the man, the younger to the elder. Just, as, on the other hand, the elder is held responsible for the misdemeanors of the younger. The elder brother is expected to pay the debts of the younger brother, no matter what the age of the latter. Also, in every business company or concern, the head is held responsible, both legally and morally, for the conduct of his subordinates (the *Fantasy* called "A Spark from the Engine" happens to be an example that actually occurred). And each family is, in turn, but a cog in the wheel of State; for which it must be expected to sacrifice, as an honour conferred upon itself, if the call come.

However, on points domestic and social, as well as in those political and industrial, Japan is in a state of transition. What the outcome will be one can, again, only wonder. May she never lose that strength and discipline,

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inherited from traditions of Samurai ancestors; nor that innate love of beauty, shared even by the humblest coolie. May her women never lose that soul which enables them to sing with breaking heart, or to smile over the bier of an idolised only son who has "given his life for the emperor." All Japanese women I love, but to those among them bewildered between the old and the new—questioning, wondering, and seeking—this book, by a seeker of the West, is dedicated.

May I here express appreciation to Madame A. G. Paschkoff, without whose encouragement and suggestion these *Fantasies*—written in idle moments of recollection—would never have seen the light of day.

JANET B. MONTGOMERY McGOVERN.

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA,
October, 1923.

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The Butterflies of Taiwan[1]

I SAID: Because it is the case that
Every living man must in the end die,
While we are in the world let us be merry.
But I found that happiness comes not with pursuing.
Like the butterflies of Taiwan,
It flutters about the coolie pushing the *toro*[2] up-hill;
The mother with the burden in her body or on her back.
Is it wary of the net of the pursuer,
Or curious, like the butterflies of Taiwan?

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The Wolf Call

THE cry of the wolf in the forest brings me comfort.
I know not why that cry rather than another.
But so it is. I know now the loneliness of the human soul.
I know that no physical contact,
Touch of hand, straining embrace;
Nothing of the body, can allay that loneliness,
That hunger of the heart and soul.
I am comforted. For when I knew
That the disease for which there is no cure
Was upon me, I tried to reach my Beloved in a foreign land.
I crossed our Islands; an ocean,
Part of a continent.
Then here, in the desert, the last agony came—here—
I can go no further. I must die
Without the sight of my Beloved
For which I have so hungered;
Without the touch of his hand.
But I am comforted, for I know now
That if I had reached him, even then
Lonely must I have gone out. It is well
That my soul—that part of me
Which could think and feel—
Should go out on the last note of that wolf cry;
The cry that has given me strength,
And clearness of vision to see
The nakedness and the loneliness
Of every human soul.

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Put down the gun, I pray,
Friend that has given me shelter.
Spare the wolf a little longer.
He can do no harm there in the forest
For an hour or two.
I would not turn coward at the last,
And cry out my own loneliness.

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Cherry Trees in April

AS the branches of cherry trees in April
Are broken beneath the weight of blossoms,
So is my body broken beneath the weight of my love.
Is my love like the blossoms here,
Without perfume and without promise of fruit?
Then may my frail body break
Before the blossoming time is past.

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The Bamboo, the Plum and the Pine

SOMEWHERE in this land they must be found,
The bamboo, the plum and the pine.
Because your heart is good I beg you:
Bring me a little of each;
A branch of plum-tree and a spray of pine.
These, at least, can be found. And if it be possible
A tiny bit, however small, of bamboo.
You know it is our custom at the New Year
To stand these three, bound together,
Before the doorway of our home.[1]
And now that my New Year is beginning,
Or will before the day is over,
I would look again at last
Upon that which long ago I loved.
Very long—because for many years
I have been in a strange land—my husband's—
And have worshipped his God,
As it is meet that a wife should do—or Gods;—
For to my woman's brain it never has been clear
Whether one God it is, or three, his people worship.

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But God or Gods, it matters not,
What he worshipped, and his fathers,
That did I, for I was his wife.
And faithful wife have I been.
But now a new bride-groom calls,
One who will hold all women at last;
And to his arms I go. So now am I free,
Free, in rev'rence once more to bow
To the bamboo, the plum and the pine.
Free to lie once more as a child on the mats.[2]
So take me down. This bed seems strange.
I am no more my husband's wife,
But the wife of the calling bride-groom.
Who knows that all faiths in the end are one,
And knows that no sin lies in one last rev'rence
To the New Year three-in-one, the bamboo, the plum and the pine.

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The Stone Lantern

OLD, dilapidated, grey; no longer a light-giver,
The stone lantern, or that which was once a lantern,
Stands neglected in the corner of the garden;
Lichened-over, crumbling, stones slipping one from the other,
So that men can no more stand in reverend awe
Before the sacred symbols that once these stones signified.[1]
To-day its glory consists in this: it is the support
Of a morning-glory vine, that but for the broken stones
Would trail in the dust, trodden under foot,
A thing of hideousness, a smear of green slime on the *geta*.[2]
Instead of the heaven-reflecting joy that to-day smiles in the sunshine.
So does the old lantern still serve a purpose.
And so shall I believe that I do;
I, whose life has been broken, who am to a woman
What that old heap of stones is to a lantern new-made,
Glowing with light that men love in lanterns and in women's eyes.
For I, too, can act as a support, and shall,
To that fair young woman
Whom my lord has brought into the house
To bring light and perfume.

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The Tree Men called Beautiful

THEY distorted and twisted my life,
My manners, my belief in what was right and wrong.
They said I must be shaped and moulded
In mind, and body, and manners,
According to the law that Confucius had made for women.
Until I was beautiful in mind and body.
And they took the tree that I loved,
The young tree that I called mine,
And bent its branches and twisted them,
And tied them down with cord.[1]
That too must be beautiful, they said,
According to the law that worthy ancestors had made for trees.
It must be right, I thought;
Ancestors, many grandfathers back, had made the law.
I only hated, and was silent.
I smiled and did as I was told.
I was a woman.
Then one night the tree, in growing,
Burst the cords that had bound its top-most branch.
The gardener saw it in the morning.
"I must bind it with stronger cords," he said.
The tree was only a tree; it could not move or kill;
So the gardener bound it again.
And it grew with twisted branches, distorted, as the gardener willed.

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And men called it beautiful.
But I had seen the beauty of that free branch
Against the morning sky,
It gave me strength and courage.
Now I am a free branch from a tree of ancient lineage,
One whose name is not mentioned in her father's household.
"She has defied the law that Confucius made for women,"
they say.
But I have grown free, as the Gods intended trees to grow—
and women.

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The Eta[1]

WHEN I told you I was an Eta I saw you start.
Though you are kind, I know you cannot forget.
Your kindness hurts.
I see always the bridge by which I told you.
In its shadow you hid your face,
So that I might not see you start.
Or so you thought.

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The Little One the Water-Spirit Loved

(*Mother holding in her hand the garment of a drowned child.*)

SO young he could not go alone on earth
Across that tiny stream.
How then can he go alone across that great gulf
Which the dead must pass?
Will the monsters there, too, envy me
And draw him down,
So that when I cross that gulf
The light in his eyes will not welcome me,
Or his baby smile?
But there, as here, must I ever be content
Holding his little garment in my hand?
Keeping it ever wet,[1]
For I have neither man nor other child
Before whom I must smile dry-eyed?

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The Spider Web

TO-NIGHT I am very happy;
As happy as the spider
Who succeeds after many attempts
In reaching the door-post with his silken thread.
They tell me I cannot live till morning.
The thread of my soul will reach at last
The other half of me,
Who has waited so long on the other side.
Is she weary?
I have taken long in the spinning.

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The Wild Honeysuckle

IT has grown across his grave;
This struggling vine,
Since last I was here.
And twined about the tablet at the grave head.
I could not bear to come before.
It was too bitter, the thought
That it was this son
Who lay here; whose back
The burning beam had broken,
Who died in slow agony,
Because he waited to throw to safety
His brother—and that,
My son too, but a liar.
(God forgive me; but here I cannot lie
To my own heart; and we mothers
Are not blind as men say we are;
Or stupid; though we would have the world believe us so.)
A liar, a braggart, vainglorious, a coward.
He lives and boasts and struts and poses.
And I must conceal from the world
What he is—or strive to.
While this boy lies here—the light of my soul.
Soul—but is there a soul?
I have turned from creeds—Buddhist, Christian—all.
The old doubt comes back—the old wonder.
Life beyond the grave—?
Only to know "Yes" or "No"; then the mind were at rest!
No man can prove to me there is not.

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The Wild Honeysuckle

None can prove there is.
The old torture of uncertainty, of questioning,
That eats into life's core and makes mock
Of words that the gentle-hearted
Would urge in comfort. . . . . .

The honeysuckle that grows across his grave—
I crush the bloom.
(Pain finds joy in destruction.)
The blossom is gone but its fragrance lingers.
So perhaps lingers the fragrance of his life.
Even God can not kill beauty.
Or its essence—too impalpable for form
In soul or body. And the world may catch the fragrance.

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The Cry of the Crane

THE woman had borne me a child;
I had laughed and gone my way.
She cried to me in her agony; her desolation.
I rode away untouched; my heart was turned to stone.
The sight of the new born child—my own—did not move me.

Why, then, did the cry of the crane,
Startled, as I rode past the swamp at midnight,
After an evening of roistering,
Open my heart to an understanding
Of that woman's suffering,
Make me feel her soul as my own,
Make me turn, shamed and stricken,
And ride to the hut where she lay dying
With my child in her arms?

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White Iris

WHEN my lord condemned her to death
He was right by the law of his people
And of mine; and, by the custom of our land.
That custom she had broken.
Her father's will, which should be a daughter's law,
She had defied. She had loved where she would;
Not wed where her father willed.
She had forgotten she was a nobleman's daughter—
Yet my lord was generous; she was our only child—
A son had been denied us—He loved her,
So he forbore to make of her a spectacle;
A thing of ridicule, an outcast from her father's house.
And though it was due his people—long-dead ancestors
And those still living—that she must die—
For she had not given herself for gold
To help father or brothers—
That my lord would have accounted virtue.
But "for her own sinful pleasure;
That which she called loving—
As if a noblewoman of our ancient race
Might love by choice of her own,
Like a dancing-girl or the base-born—
Might wed at the bidding of love, not at that of her father;
As if for a noblewoman there could be other law
Than the law of duty; and that law she had broken"—
Thus spoke my lord, her father. Yet he was generous;
He granted her death by her own hand.

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Generously, too, he allowed her the choice of weapons.
And she chose—as ever bravely—the dagger;
No weakling death of water or of sleeping-draught.

* * * * *

Not for this, though, do I heap white iris-buds
Among the purple, with which my lord's sisters
Have covered her little body—
But rather that she had the higher courage,
Knowing the penalty she must pay,
To love where she would—
Her father having commanded marriage with another—
And having loved—and given—
To go to her father, telling him all;
Not with tears and broken pleas for forgiveness;
But proudly, with head held high and shining eyes.
"Do with me what thou wilt," she said.
"I have known heaven; a life-time of earth
Would but soil my happiness. Nor will I ever suffer the touch,
Be it but that of finger tip, of another man"—
Had I but had this courage twenty years ago!
Women are braver creatures now.

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Purple Berries

MY bird flew yester morn from its cage;
The door was not made fast.
Over the fields of rice; over the hedges of tea;
Carolling joy at its freedom,
Freedom it never had known,
Into the woods it flew,
Seeking a mate it had glimpsed,
A mate which had answered its song.
To-day it is back in its cage,
Feathers ruffled and torn; eyes glazing;
Drooping its little body, swollen, distorted.
Its beak is stained with the juice of berries,
Purple berries that are death to birds.
Wild birds—wise in the lore of Nature—know, and avoid.
Mine, cage-hatched, hand-fed, knew not, and is dying.
Yet that one day of cageless freedom,
That one wild carol of joy—
Never before had it sung so—
That one glad mating with the love of its choice—
Not the mate men had chosen, thrust into its cage—
Was it not worth the pain that followed? And death?
I know, for I, too, have eaten of purple berries;
I, too, have come back to my cage to die.
But the one day of freedom—
The one intoxication of love and of life—
Was worth all that followed,
And that will follow till I die.
And perhaps afterwards.

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For if among the shades there be purple berries,
Those, too, will I eat, for I fear the Gods
No more than I fear men,—or devils—
And devils I have known, disguised as men,
And been rent by. But the taste of unknown fruit—
Fruit of my own choosing—I will know.
So now that my bird is dead and no longer needs my care,
I go to eat of purple berries in the land
That priests would have me fear.

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Incense

THESE long green sticks I shall burn
At the shrine of the Goddess of Mercy.
As the sweet smoke rises she will understand—
As men cannot—why I burn it.
Not for my own soul—I am no coward—
I shall not shrink from payment,
Nor pay tithes to Kwannon[1]
That she make the payment light.
I have known hell on earth;
Why fear that in earth's bowels?
Nor for the soul of the son that I slew
Am I burning this.
Neither as a petitioner for myself nor another
Do I bow prostrate at the feet
Of our Lady of Mercy.
Rather in boundless gratitude, in humblest reverence,
That she gave me strength. That my courage held;
That heart did not falter; nor hand tremble.
Now the world will never know
That my son was a thief.
For I took the treasure back stealthily by night.
Only the Gods know. And they are merciful;
Kwannon, at least; herself a mother,
Or so our legends say.
She gave me strength—To her
I light another stick before I go to join my son.
Mayhap, in her boundless mercy
Will she, with one of her hundred hands,

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Reach down and with our blood—
Mine and my son's, ere the greedy earth drink it all—
Wipe from the tablets which the Gods hold
The record of the theft. Thus will blood
Have made blood clean; the blood of noble forbears.
If this be done—and in hell I shall know—
Then shall I make of my soul incense,
To burn eternally to the glory of Kwannon.
So with scent do I drench my body
Before the knife finds here its sheath.
My soul may catch and hold the fragrance.

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The Broken Bow

PROUD was I of my bow and quiver of arrows;
That birthday gift the morn I was nine;
Real arrows that would kill real birds I was told.
It was true, for when, singing with joy,
Into the woods I went, to slay sweeter singers,
These fell. Then like a savage I shouted;
I danced with delight; pride-drunk and self-pleased.
I had proved myself, I believed,
A worthy scion of a noble race,
A race famed for its archers, in days
When men slew each other with arrows.
The birds I had shot were quite dead
When my man-servant brought them,
And, kneeling, presented with praise these proofs of my prowess.
But one I myself found was not dead;
Only wounded and gasping. My man hurried forward.
Out of its pain he would put it, he said.
But I waved him away. The wounded bird
I held in my hands; I drew out the arrow,
Its blood against my breast I tried to staunch—
Useless my efforts; a man would have known.
A child believes that which it wills must be,
And I willed the life of that bird. But it passed—
Passed I think into me; or so at the time it seemed,
For as its fluttering heart, held close against my heart,
Grew weaker, and the fluttering ceased,
And the eyes, looking up into mine, glazed and grew dim;
The pain of that arrow-wound entered my breast.
I staggered and but for my man would have fallen.

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My heart, too, for the time seemed to cease in its beating.
Then—then—I knew that which man may not utter ;
Nor woman—the tenderer man; nor even a child.
Men thought me mad when I tried to speak. Only I knew
the others were mad;
These who derided; those who still would slay;
For in that moment Amida, the God of Light and of Life,
Took me to his breast, as I had taken the bird.
And I knew that my life and the bird's and Amida's—
All that live and breathe and feel,
On earth, in heaven, in hell—are one.
And that one day all must know, as in that moment I knew
So when I was able to move, I broke my bow,
And ever since men have called me coward and weakling.
But men's scorn is easier to hear than my own scorn or
Amida's.

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Singing Insects

SEMI[1]—singing insects—boys catch in June,
And put in bamboo cages. There, through waning days,
They sing their lives away. The children laugh,
And say, "See! The *Gitcho* sings for joy."
Men know 'tis misery makes them sing;
Hopeless heart-cry for fields once known.
So, I in my bamboo and paper cage[2],
Do sing and smile and curtsey,
As from my husband's people I have learned to do.
And men, like children, cry
"How happy is the stranger, our brother's foreign bride."
God—if God there be—knows better.
When the soul is struck it must find voice;
And mine cries out in song that none may know—
None here; but merciful God—or merciless—
My own people—those across the sea—
Writing is harder than speech
When the heart is dead.
But with pen, too, must I lightly jest—and lie.
For they, most of all, must never know—
They who most of all opposed,
When I loved him and would become his wife.
That love my glory was; and ever shall be;
The memory of it. Of that can no man rob me;
Not even he—Love gave me a soul,
And he who taught me love
Can not take from me that which his teaching gave:
Not though his taunts be true; that I be not his wife;
That he had a wife ere he met and married me.
A wife of his own people, to whom he will return,

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Leaving me, neither wife nor maid,
A stranger in a strange land, his land—.
It may be true. Life holds much of cruelty:
I have seen cats torture mice and birds. Men call it play;
Boys catch and cage *Semi* to hear them sing.
Cruel? He says that it was the cruelty of a foreign woman
Whom long ago he loved—one of my land and race—
Who, smiling, drew him on, then turned
And stabbed him with her scorn,
That drove him to revenge, which he sought—and found.
Cruel? But cruelty gives courage, does it not, to those who
suffer—
Those not altogether weak? And courage I shall pray for;
Pray—to my own heart—what else?
For one God, I think, drives out another—
And I gave up mine to follow his. His Gods—
Idols, deaf and blind—are all Gods deaf and blind;
All idols, made of dream-stuff that is the fruit
Of man's helplessness and childish yearning?
Or all made of stone, as my own heart is?
But there is that
Beneath this heart of mine
Which must give life to stone
If men, and women, too, be not all liars.
And I shall pray this dead heart of mine
For courage to live on—death were the easy thing—
And shield from shame that which lies beneath it.
For the world will laugh as now I laugh;
And as the caged insects sing.

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The Spray of Plum Blossoms

SHE has separated my lord and me;
She came into my home
As a friend—a friend of mine—
And she stole his heart from me.
But because she is now dear to him
So is she also dear to me.
And I put this spray of
Plum blossoms in her room.
The first blossoms of the year, white as rice,
And white as the skin of her throat;
So I think she will understand
And have no fear.
(Fear makes lines in women's faces
And that would grieve my lord.)
The plum blossoms will make her know
—She is quick to understand.
That when the rice famine comes—
And it threatens—
There will be plenty for her and my lord;
My lord loves her
And I love my lord.
They must not suffer
Nor will I,
For when one has grown old and sallow,
And the skin of the throat lies like the folds of the *eri*[1]
It is pleasant to go over the water-fall.
My lord will think it an accident.

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That in watching its rainbow
I lean'd too far over the edge.
Perhaps at its foot
I shall dream a little
Of the time when my skin, too, was white as the rice-kernel,
Or as plum blossoms in early spring.

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The Lotus Pond

I CAME at sunset to the lotus pond,
I told them I loved the lotus flowers;
That I wanted to see the last rays of the sun
Strike across the pink buds.
I knew that he loved the lotus pond;
I thought he might walk there at sunset.
He came; a woman was with him.
He loved her. By the light in his eyes I knew that;
And by the tone of his voice,
As he spoke to her of the lotus buds.
Now I speak the truth when I say
That I love the lotus buds.
One may grow out of my heart,
And may give him joy in passing;
Perhaps he may even stoop to pluck it,
For I shall lie near the shore
Beneath the water of the lotus pond,
And shall gather the roots of the lotus buds close about my heart.

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Death and Life

HE is dead.
Men wonder that I am not desolate.
When I smile, they think me brave or a hypocrite.
I am neither. Every night he is mine.
In the land where death and life mingle
He is once more with me.
In the cottage at the foot of the tall bamboo
Where first our love-dream was.
His arms, white as paper from the mulberry bark,
Caress me. But now he is all mine.
I share him with neither man nor woman.
And men wonder why I am not desolate.
I smile, and they think me brave—or a hypocrite.

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Gull's Wings

ACROSS my prison window they have flashed
The white wings of a gull homing seaward.
I remember the ancient legend—
The gull has caught in its wings the sunlight.
This legend has come before to my ears;
Not to my heart. Now I understand,
And know what beauty means, and the joy that beauty brings.
The nail that secretly I drew from my boot-heel.
And was sharp'ning—between the turns of the sentry—
That it might pierce to the heart and bring peace,
I shall fling away. The gull may pass my window again.

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The Sunflower Woman

AS the sunflower here in this strange island[1]
Craves for the light of the sun,
So do I crave for the sunlight of joy
And for my own following of it.
Not to be a "woman of joy"—
The joy of men who can pay for it
With wine and with gold;
But my own joy, the following of my own sun;
This I long for, and will have.
As the sunflower dyes her petals
With the rays of the sun she catches;
So will I dye the garments of my soul
Golden with the gold that women miss
Who take gold from men
Who hold them lightly;
Or from husbands
Who feed them, and clothe, and house,
That they may be the mothers of sons.
For me the wine of the sea-breeze;
The gold that scatters the mists at dawn.
That crimsons the sea at even.
My roof the vault of the heaven;
My food what I draw from the sea,
Or pluck in the deeps of the wood.
Of clothing I reck not—sea-weed or leaves—
Or rags that beggars have cast.

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What matter, when joy has come at last,
With the finding of freedom;
With the owning of my own spirit?
Or does my spirit own me?
Together like lovers we'll wander.
That part of me which men knew
And that part of me new-found.
As the sunflower turns to the sun,
So will I follow my own spirit;
That part of me which is God.

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Grey Walls

WHY, though I had seen those things
The world has to offer
That men call most fair,
And 'broider with terms of wonder and magnificence,
Did I remain blind to beauty
Until, by chance, I saw a spray of apple-blossoms
Across an angle made by the meeting
Of two old grey walls?
Apple blossoms I had seen before,
And walls. Then why at that moment
Did something in me open
That made me understand the world's beauty
And also its pain?
And why do I know that in some strange fashion
The two are one, ever striving together,
Yet ever united?

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Moonlight

WAS it because it was moonlight
When you told me good-bye
That I believe it is the water touched by
the moon's beams
That always first freezes?

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The Moth's Wing

THEY tell me my man is dead—
And my babe, the boy that was his father's image;
That I shall never walk again.
It was the railway;
The smoking, mannerless brutal thing
They have brought from the Western world—
But why this thing happened to me and mine
I do not know—
I only know that it was night
When they told me; they held a candle near my face.
About the candle a moth fluttered—
Once it brushed my cheek—
The moth had brown spots on its wings;
Three spots on each wing. It is the wings of this moth
That I see ever before me
When I try to recall the faces of my man and child.
The wings with their brown spots and their fine hairs;
Each hair grown large before my eyes, as though
It were through a microscope I saw it.
And when I would recall the touch
Of my man's hand, or the feel of my babe's tender flesh,
It is the brush of the moth's wing against my cheek I feel.

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The Firefly Woman

MEN call her evil; she wears fireflies in her hair.
They say that each firefly is the soul of a man
Who died for love of her, this dancing girl without heart.
I know that the fireflies are the grave-fires
Of O-Hanna's heart. She killed that
When, at her father's behest, she gave her beauty to men,
That her brother might go to Tokio to the University;
And the fisherman's son that she had met
At the pulling-in of the nets wedded another.
The fireflies, men say, will light the way to hell
For the soul of this one-time fisher girl,
Now the queen of dance-women.
But I know otherwise. I am the wife
Of the fisher-lad who once loved O-Hanna-san.
From my man I know her soul
Shines like a fire-fly in the darkness of men's souls,
And it may be that in a land
Where there is neither buying nor selling of love
We three, my fisher lord, and I and O-Hanna-san,
Shall walk forever hand in hand, in firefly light.

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The Palace of Starlight

BY day men pity me,
For all has been taken from me,
And I lie without *fouton*[1] on a heap of straw
In a hut open to wind and rain.
But none know my riches; they are hidden
In the starlight that by night streams in
Through the broken door when I am alone.
Then all I have had comes back to me,
And much that I never had or hoped for.
So I am rich with the riches that none can filch;
For though the stars flee before the spears of the Day God,
Yet to-morrow night shyly will they come forth again.
Moving softly, as gentle women who might have loved me,
Tripping in time to music that sings in my soul.
Though men have failed me, and women, yet is Nature constant,
And I am happy, clasping star beams to my breast,
As I wander at night through the palace
The stars build before my eyes.

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Paper Carp

TO-DAY they drink the wind, the paper carp,
With heads toward the wind's source,
As real carp swim—or so our elders tell—
Against the stream. So have these fish become
The symbol of the manhood of our race;
Strong to overcome all odds, battling 'gainst life's stream.
And to-day—as ev'ry fifth of May—those fortunate ones
Who have given men-children to their lords
Hang before their homes carp made of shimmering paper;
Red, silver, golden, green—the colours loved of Gods—
That men, seeing, these may know
Kwannon[1] has blessed that home;
That out of her hundred-handed store it has pleased her
Mercy to bestow, that the name may not die out. . . . .
And to-day, at last, our home is blessed,
Though I am very old, long past the age
When women may give children to their lords,
And my lord is blind and grown feeble 'neath the burden
of his years.
He cannot see the golden carp; our own before our door,
But ere I raised it to its staff
He took it in his hands and blessed it.
And now, as, filled with wind, it floats and flutters,
He hears the swish and smiles.
"This is to die content," he says.
For over ten years no carp has hung before our door,
No smile has lighted my dear lord's face or mine.
For our son, our only son, had done that
Which was unworthy of my lord's son.

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Men called him coward; said he had trembled in the face of
danger,
Had shrunk from the blare of Russian guns—
He did not deny; my lord turned him from our door,
For twenty years we have had no son. But now—
Now in his own blood is he redeemed.
Blood shed for the Emperor. No longer an officer,
But as the meanest of privates he sought service
And on the field sought danger—and found it.
He has come back a cripple, marred, face shot away;
No day without pain, nor can be to the end;
But our son once more.
So merrily sails the carp in the wind;
And happily beats my old heart, and my lord's;
And that of our wounded son. The Gods are good.

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The Spark from the Engine

THE wood by the side of the railway is burned.
It was government wood, belonging to our gracious lord,
The Emperor, to Him descended from a line of Gods
Who deigned to step from heaven to earth
When chaos reigned, to give rulers to this fair land.
And it is burned, this wood, utterly destroyed
By a spark, men say, from a passing engine.
Some fireman was careless, or engine-driver, perhaps.
It matters little who. 'Tis I must pay the penalty.
The supreme price; for I am manager of the road.
And to offer a lesser life were affront to Him
Who is sprung from the loins of Gods.
To-day I make all things ready and take leave of my bride,
She will understand; she is brave and schooled in the old teachings.
Then I will bow before the tablets of my ancestors,
And to-night I shall sit on the mat alone—with my knife—
As my ancestors sat
When they had offended the Gods, or the God-descended.
My assistant would die in my place.
For him the wine of life is drunk; its dregs are bitter.
But this must not be; Gods will not be mocked.
Rather must I be proud, for I have been given the choice of deaths,
And Hari-kiri is a noble death, cleansing from all stain;
One that no base-born man may choose.
Dying so, my unborn child will revere his father's memory,
And my name will be placed beside those of honorable ancestors.
So, dying, I drink to Death and to my lord, the Emperor,
And to the son I shall not see.

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The Gold Piece

MY lord will not miss of all his store
This one ten-yen piece of gold—or me.
It must be held tight between my teeth—
This gold. The Gods will not be cheated.
Therefore quietly must I go to sleep, and very gently.
Not for me that which tired women love,
The water's soft embrace; for weakly might I gasp,
And gasping, the gold be gone,
And theft and death be vain.
For me must be the dagger thrust—
Sharp and swift as scorpion sting—to life's source.
Thus, conscious to the end, can I remember
Ever tighter, tighter, tighter,
To clench that which will ransom
From Buddhist hells, which holy pictures show,
My little hunch-back son—
Condemned becaused he cursed his father
When my lord spoke of the deformed boy bitterly, and with disgust,
Not knowing that the child would understand.
But he was old enough to catch his father's meaning
And to curse.
Soon after this he died;
On earth as in heaven is there no room
For one who, breaking the law of the Gods,
Will dare to curse his father.
Now I am free to follow; for the doctors say
I can never bear my lord another child—
I am not cast down as are other women
Upon whom this verdict falls; I laugh and am glad,

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The Gold Piece

Because now I may follow to hell
The only child I ever bore, my little hunch-back boy.
For a moment I shall look upon his face,
A look that must last me through eternity,
Then he, flying upward, will go to heaven.
I have between my teeth the price of his ransom.
Goddess of Mercy give me strength
Not to wish to cast it out,
That in hell I might have him ever near me—
The son whom I cannot follow to heaven,
Because I have stolen from my lord the ransom he would not give.

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The Torn Kakemono

WHEN I was very little, I went to a missionary school.
The foreign ladies were kind; there was a tree at Christmas,
And eggs at Easter, and many beautiful pictures
For Sunday-school lessons well learned. I became a Christian
And because the *kakemono*[1] that had been my mother's,
And had hung in the *tokonomo*[2] of the room where she died
Contained the picture of a Buddhist saint,
I took it from the little box, where it lay rolled
Together with my best *kimono*[3] and the *obi*[4] my mother had given me,
And tore it across the face of the Buddhist saint,
And showed it to the Sunday-school teacher for praise—which I received.
Then I was a little girl; now I am an old woman,
And have learned many things; among others
That no religion is good, none bad;
That no man and no woman is wholly good or wholly bad;
That a little of that which is in the worst,
As a little of that which is in the best is in me;
For I have felt impulses of the vilest,
As I have known moments of aspiration of the noblest
In my own heart. And I know that God,
If God there be, Buddhist or Christian,
Will judge men and women by their strivings
And aspirations more than by their deeds.
And I know that God—if God there be—
Will judge no man by the aspect of God he worships,
Or by the saint he loves; or woman either.
So gently I paste together the torn edges of the old *kakemono*
That was my mother's, the beauty of which
In my youthful arrogance I destroyed.

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The Torn Kakemono

That was before the day I stood on the hill,
To be alone a little with the pain in my own heart,
And saw the mist rise from the valley below.
A little at a time it rose, and the sun seemed to shine
On that spot alone that was free from mist.
Sun-gilded, shimmering, a world new-born,
Seemed for the moment each tiny earth-spot.
And my heart understood—and understands—
The meaning of pain, and man's cruelty
And bigotry and intolerance; each mistaking
His own little earth-spot of mind and spirit
For that world of many worlds and many universes
Which only God—the sun of all suns—knows and illumines.
But because I am a woman and ignorant
I can not say what I would,
But can only paste together with reverence
The *kakemono* picturing the Buddhist saint,
And hang that by the side of the picture of the Christ on the Cross,
Knowing that both are rays of God's sun-light,
Shining through the valley of chaos and pain—this hell that men call earth;
And that—it may be—slowly this mist, too, is lifting,
Like the mist in the valley that day.

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The Thunder Gods

TO-DAY the Thunder Gods strike on their anvils in heaven.
My heart glows like the red-hot iron
On the anvil of the village smith;
For I know that my Beloved has not forgotten.
So did the Thunder Gods strike
When he swore that I was the full moon of his life.
And though soon after he gave up his life
In battle for our Father, the Emperor,
And I gave up mine for the father who gave me life,
That he, being old, and without a son to provide,
Might have the comforts that I could buy from men
By dancing and singing—and that which a woman may give.
Yet when the Thunder Gods strike, I know
That my Beloved is thinking, too, of me,
And is waiting for me in the land
Where those go who die for the Emperor.
For a man like my Beloved loves but once,
And his love will draw me up to him
Though I be but a dance-girl;
For he will know that a woman's virginity
And her soul belong to her love; not to her lovers.

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The Devil's Snuff Box

NOW that which for many years I have lived for
Is done; now that my enemy is vanquished,
Now that I know myself the victor—
What do I know myself for?
For that which is empty but for foulness;
Like that fungus which children call
The devil's snuff-box; a skin filled with nothingness
But evil odour. A prick, a puff of black dust;
A smell; and the memory of that which offended.
Yet, in vanishing, the devil's snuff-box
Spreads seeds of its own foulness
In the dust that it scatters.
So will the trail which I leave behind
In the applause with which men hail my name
Make other devil's snuff-boxes; fair to the seeming;
Swollen with pride and with the bloating corruption
Into which dead souls turn.
Till, their mission filled, their enemies vanquished,
They know themselves but for stench and dust,
Their souls consumed with consuming,
Vanquished in the victory that men applaud,
As children clap their hands
At the sight of devil's snuff-boxes.

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The Yellow Chrysanthemum

THE golden glory of its heart has entered into mine;
This wondrous perfect flower.
It has survived the blighting frost
That cruelly has killed all others of its kind.
The wind is cold, the sky is grey.
But this yellow flower makes bright
My brown and sodden garden.
So in my heart brightly burns the flame of joy
In this the chrysanthemum season of my life.[1]
It warms the sodden garden of my soul
The flame of joy that love has lighted
For this child not mine,
But my lord's and another woman's.
When first he brought the boy—a babe—to our home,
Saying that here he must live, to be trained as was fitting a nobleman's heir,
Since the Gods had denied to me, his wife, a son,
My heart was as the sodden soil of the garden, here,
And a frost like that of yesternight
Froze my heart within me, turning all black
As the frost has turned my flowers.
Because I came of a Samurai race I could not cry out,
But could only bow before my lord, and smile.
His wish was my law, I said, his son should be as my own.
Nor did the child lack care.
But because my soul is evil, I did not love him. I wished him dead.
That wish, I think, brought the illness.

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Then with loathing I knew my own soul; knew its foulness;
But the child did not. In his pain he held out his arms to me,
Begging that I would soothe. Then my heart was opened.
Love, such as I did not know that the heart of a woman
Could hold for a child, filled me,
As a temple on feast days is filled
With incense, fragrant and warming.
And because the gods are good, Amida and Kwannon,[2]
My prayers are answered. The boy is better,
To-day he walks with me in the garden. I pluck for him this golden flower.
In the chrysanthemum time of my life
Happiness such as I have never known is mine.

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The Moonflower

THE flower that lives in the light of the moon
Will, when morning comes, enfold betimes in its closing petals
The air-dancers[1] of night who in the moonlight
Have crept into its heart to drink of its nectar.
Drowned in the joy they have sought, suffocated with sweetness.
I, too, a dancer of night, have at last found my nectar
Unbought have I given, and taken—of nectar,
In the light of the moon. Now would I, too, go;
Lest the days that come after—and the nights—
Dim the radiance which to-night's moon has given,
Take from me that which fills my heart,
Which glorifies my life, which makes holy
That which the world counts shame.
So to the holy moon, the protector of women,
I clap my hands and pray
That in his[2] beams, which to-night make of the silvered earth
A perfect moon-flower,
I may be enfolded, may be drawn to his heart.
There to sleep forever, drowned in the nectar I have drunk.

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Fingers of God

AT sunset, the Lord of the sky[1]
God of my people—tore asunder the clouds
And through the rents he had made thrust his fingers.
Down he reached till he touched the earth,
Grey and drenched with the tears which all day
Had fallen upon her face.
Then she smiled, and each cloud-tear
That lingered upon leaf or flower petal
Was by God's fingers turned into a jewel-world.
Glowing with color, fit for fairies to dwell in,
Or spirits of babies unborn—too pure for this world.
Then did my old self die, with its pain
And its bitter unvoiced longing for that which had passed me by.
Then was my new self born—
For I knew that at the end of earth's day
Would come the touch of God's fingers,
Tearing the clouds apart,
Turning tears to jewels and fairy worlds.
Had there been no tears on earth's face
She could not have offered jewels and fairy wonders
To our Lord in the sky when his fingers caressed her.
So I turned, as my ancestors did,

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And as fisher-folk do to-day—
Once I laughed at the custom—
And clapped my hands and made reverence
To that point in the sky where God's fingers came through,
Knowing that behind the broken clouds
Was the shining disk of God's face,
That on the morrow I should see it in its glory,
For the Lord of the sky was now the lord of my heart;
I had been touched by God's fingers.

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Red Azaleas

A WIFE I have never held in my arms,
Though I have been ten years married,
And am the father of children;
Only the body of a woman
Given to me by the law, and her father.
Though faithful in every wifely duty,
Her soul was not mine;
Nor, I think, her senses.
So I am no more widowed to-night
Than I have ever been.
Nay, less widowed;
For in her dying glance
She gave me more of herself—
That inmost something which no embrace,
No physical possession, can grasp—
Than I had ever known.
So I shall gather red azaleas,
She may see, and understand,
And know why I am happy.

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Lake Hakone

MANY loves have I known and much intoxication—
With sake,[1] with women, with war.
Only so could the horror of life
Be lashed into place and forgotten.
But the deepest intoxication, the rapture of sense and of spirit,
That whelmed me when first I beheld
The snow-capped cone of the sacred mountain[2]
Reflected at sunrise in Hakone's waters,
Like an ivory fan on a coral bed,
I have never been able to recapture.
So I, who would know once more the oblivion of intoxication,
Shall climb again to the crater-cone
That holds in its hollow the sacred mirror,
Like one of the treasures in a Shinto temple.[3]
And at the sight of God's mountain reflected
I shall know that while goodness has been soiled in the market-place—
Haggled over, bargained for, with coins of applause and of self-laudation—
That while truth has betrayed me, and I, truth;
Yet is beauty real in a world of phantoms,
And the Gods gracious to the man who has eyes
Wherewith to drink to drunkenness.

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Notes on the Poems

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Notes

The Butterflies of Taiwan—p. 1.

[1] In Taiwan (Formosa) the butterflies are of large size and wonderful colouring. In the woods they flutter about the Chinese-Formosan coolies going about their tasks; they even evince a sort of curiosity, seeming to be attracted by brightly colored articles of clothing. But the moment one is pursued the friendly curiosity of all is gone. They flutter out of sight.

[2] Push car, or trolley, used in mountainous districts of Taiwan (Formosa) for bringing camphor wood to the camphor factory in Taihoku, the capital of the island.

The Bamboo, the Plum and the Pine—p. 5.

[1] Sprays of bamboo, of plum and of pine, bound together, are placed in front of every Japanese house at the New Year. The evergreen pine represents long life, and is also often regarded as a symbol of life eternal—beyond the grave. The bamboo represents rectitude and unchangeableness. The plum is the symbol of endurance and of chastity. Each of those is associated with the idea of immortality.

[2] The Japanese do not sleep on beds, but on *fouton* (quilts) spread at night on the *tatami* (mats) and during the day carefully hidden away in cupboards.

The Stone Lantern—p. 7.

[1] The stone lanterns (*toro*) of Japan are built of stones carved to represent the five elements, earth, water, air, fire, ether. The custom of so building them was introduced by Buddhist missionaries from China in the 7th and 8th centuries of the Christian era.

[2] Wooden shoe, or clog, worn by the Japanese.

The Tree Men called Beautiful—p. 8.

[1] It is the custom in Japan so to bind and twist the branches of young trees that they grow in an artificial and distorted shape.

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The Eta—p. 10.

[1] The Eta are the outcast people of Japan. Many among them, especially the women, are extremely beautiful. To a European it is impossible to detect the difference between a Japanese and an Eta, so like in appearance are the outcast and despised Eta to the Japanese, proper. But marriage between them is strictly forbidden, as is all social intercourse. Only many of the brothels are recruited from the ranks of the Eta women. Regarding the origin of the Eta there are many conflicting theories. Some Japanese historians regard them as descendants of Korean prisoners; others as being of mixed Ainu blood. All butchers and leather workers in Japan are supposed to be Eta.

The Little One the Water-Spirit Loved—p. 11.

[1] That is, with her tears.

Incense—p. 20.

[1] The Goddess of Mercy, usually represented in Japan as having a hundred hands.

Singing Insects—p. 24.

[1] A Japanese insect—akin to the grasshopper, which because of the chirping sound that it makes—one of which the Japanese are fond—is caught and kept until its death in a little bamboo cage. Many of these are kept in Japanese houses. Japanese children usually call these insects "*Gitcho.*"

[2] Japanese houses are largely made of bamboo and paper.

The Spray of Plum Blossoms—p. 26.

[1] A folded kerchief, usually of silk, worn by Japanese women at the throat, as a sort of collar.

The Sunflower Woman—p. 31.

[1] Sunflowers do not grow in Japan proper, but only in Formosa (*Taiwan*) the island colony of Japan.

The Palace of Starlight—p. 37.

[1] Padded quilt, on which it is the custom of the Japanese to sleep.

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Paper Carp—p. 38.

[1] The Goddess of Mercy; usually represented with a hundred arms and hands.

The Torn Kakemono—p. 43.

[1] Scroll on which is drawn or painted a sacred picture or sacred legend.

[2] Niche in a Japanese room, on the wall of which the *kakemono* is hung. Below it on a little pedestal usually stands an image of Buddha.

[3] Native dress of the Japanese, both men and women.

[4] Wide sash, worn by Japanese women.

The Yellow Chrysanthemum—p. 47.

[1] In Japan the seasons are marked by the different flowers, beginning with the plum season which is immediately after the melting of the winter snows. The chrysanthemum season is of course in the autumn.

[2] See footnote to *Fantasy* entitled *Incense*.

The Moonflower—p. 49.

[1] Small insects which fly at night in Japanese gardens.

[2] In Japanese the moon is personified as masculine.

Fingers of God—p. 50.

[1] The Shintoists of Japan reverence the sun; and at its rising and its setting they—according to ancient custom—are supposed to clap their hands (always a symbol in Japan that the Gods are to be invoked) and murmur prayers. In actual practice this custom is now confined chiefly to the peasants and the fisher folk.

Lake Hakone—p. 53.

[1] Rice-wine.

[2] Mt. Fuji (Fuji-Yama). The cone of this mountain when reflected at sunrise in Lake Hakone presents the peculiar illusion of being detached from the mountain proper, and seeming to float as an inverted white cone—or as a half-opened fan, a comparison of which the Japanese are fond—in the waters of the lake, then usually reflecting the coral-tinted clouds of dawn.

[3] The three treasures of a Shinto shrine are:—The sacred mirror (usually of steel or copper), the sacred sword, and the sacred ball.

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